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BEN JONSON'S PROBABLE AUTHORSHIP OF SCENE 2,  
ACT IV, OF FLETCHER'S "BLOODY BROTHER."

THE powerful tragedy of *The Bloody Brother*, on the story of Rollo, Duke of Normandy, is printed in the works of Beaumont and Fletcher as their joint production, but is universally admitted to be one of the plays in which Beaumont had no share. The drama, nevertheless, is not generally supposed to be the unassisted production of Fletcher. His collaborator is usually believed to have been Ben Jonson, a theory strongly accredited by the circumstance of the first edition of the drama, printed in 1639, having borne upon the title-page the initials B. J. F.; although in the next edition, published in the following year, the piece is ascribed to Fletcher alone. A considerable share in it has been claimed for Massinger; Mr. Fleay and Professor Herford confine Jonson's participation to the second scene of the fourth act. Mr. Arthur Bullen, whose standard edition of Beaumont and Fletcher has not yet reached *The Bloody Brother*, thus gives his opinion in his article on Fletcher in the *Dictionary of National Biography*: "A plausible view is that *The Bloody Brother* was written in the first instance by Fletcher and Jonson, and that it was revised by Massinger on occasion of its revival at Hampton Court in January 1636-7." We do not propose to inquire whether other scenes may be traced to Jonson's hand besides the one allowed to be his by Fleay and Herford, or whether there is sufficient reason for attributing any part of the piece to Massinger. Our object is to strengthen the evidence for Jonson's authorship of the second scene of the fourth act, by showing that this scene reveals an erudition greater than any contemporary dramatist can be supposed to have possessed. Milton, it will be remembered, writing in rare Ben's lifetime, picks out learning as his most distinctive quality: "If Jonson's learned sock be on." We shall point out cogent—we do not say absolutely indisputable—evidence of the writer's acquaintance with an ancient Latin drama at that time known to very few. We shall also signalize the

remarkable exactness of his acquaintance with astrology. Alone among the poets—Dryden and professional astrologers excepted—who have handled this theme, he seems to have been thoroughly versed in the subject.

The ancient Latin play which has been referred to as probably known to the writer of the scene in *The Bloody Brother* ascribed to Ben Jonson, is one which before Jonson's time existed in printed shape in only two editions, but in 1619 became accessible to anyone who should provide himself, as Ben probably would, with the last and best edition of Plautus. It is the anonymous *Querolus*, or *Aulularia*, first published by Danielis in 1564, republished by Rittershusius in 1595, and printed for the third time in 1619 by Pareus at the end of his edition of Plautus. In the nineteenth century the play has been edited in 1829 by Klinkhåmer, who restored it to its original metrical form, and since by Peiper, and in the *Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études* by Havet, who has supplied a French prose translation. It is also the subject of a most entertaining essay, with translated specimens, in the *Horae dramaticae* of Thomas Love Peacock, which originally appeared in *Fraser's Magazine*, and is reprinted in Sir Henry Cole's and the present writer's editions of Peacock's works.

The *Querolus* is a remarkable relic of antiquity, the sole witness to the existence of a Latin drama during the later ages of the empire. From its mention of *solidi*, first coined under Constantine, it would appear not to be earlier than that emperor. It also appears from internal evidence to have been written during the commotions excited in Gaul by the Bagaudae, but as these continued more than a century, this testimony is deficient in chronological precision. The particularity of the reference, however, countenances the conjecture that the play was written in Gaul, where, throughout the fourth century, literature was active, if hardly to be called flourishing. If, as has been deemed, a passage of singular obscurity is to be understood as a veiled satire upon the rapacity and venality of high officials, this might denote that the play was written at a time when an emperor commonly resided in Gaul; while the attitude of unquestioning faith in the

old religion might induce us to place it as early in the fourth century as possible. Perhaps the reign of Constans (337-50 A. D.) would be a probable date.

Without pretensions to poetry, originality, or subtlety in the delineation of character, *Querolus* is an excellent little play, throughout lively, clever, and amusing. Like the *Aulularia* of Plautus, after which it is sometimes incorrectly entitled, it takes its plot from the idea of a treasure buried in a house and unknown to the occupant, but has no other affinity to that play except that the prologue of both is spoken by the tutelary deity, the *lar familiaris*, who expounds the situation, and foreshadows the action of the piece. Euclio, the father of *Querolus*, has buried a treasure in his house, unknown to his son. Dying abroad, he has intrusted the secret to his friend Mandrogerus, and given the latter a letter empowering him to claim half as a reward for revealing the treasure to *Querolus*. Mandrogerus, however, a knave not entirely destitute of redeeming qualities, determines to obtain the whole, and is introduced near the beginning of the drama plotting to this end with two other rogues, Sycophanta and Sardanapalus. Here the resemblance to *The Bloody Brother* comes in. The tragic element in that powerful but generally gloomy play is relieved by a comic episode, the humors of a mendacious crew of vagabond astrologers and fortune-tellers, whom the villain of the piece renders accessory to his designs. The scene (Act IV, scene 2) attributed to Ben Jonson represents these worthies in conclave, deploring their impecunious condition and the hardness of the times, and indirectly exposing and castigating their own rascality with abundant *vis comica*. This is the exact counterpart of the scene in the *Querolus*, where the worthlessness of the interlocutors is humorously exhibited by themselves, save that the affluent genius of the English poet has made him exuberant where the Latin dramatist is content with few and simple touches.

In *The Bloody Brother* the knaves are introduced discussing their affairs *en petit comité*:

*Fiske*: Come, we are stark naught all; bad is the best of us;  
Four of the seven deadly spots we are:

Besides our lechery, we are envious,  
 And most, most gluttonous when we have it thus,  
 Most covetous when we want it; then our boy,  
 He is a fifth spot, sloth, and he undoes us.

The boy, Pippeau, turns around smartly upon his accuser, and in defending himself lays bare still more of the iniquities of the brotherhood. The conversation continues in this strain until a sudden turn is given to it and to the fortunes of the interlocutors by the entry of Latorche, who sees his way to make them instruments in affairs of state. The idea of the corresponding scene in the *Querolus* is substantially the same, but the management is different. Mandrogerus and his satellites have devised a scheme for obtaining the treasure, in pursuance of which the arch-roogue keeps in the background, and the accomplices fall into conversation respecting the preternatural skill of an almost omniscient magus, to wit, Mandrogerus himself, in such fashion as to be overheard by Querolus, as he issues from his house disposed to credit anything supernatural, in consequence of the conversation he has been holding with the domestic spirit, his family *lar*, who has greatly mystified him by ambiguous prophecies, all of which, however, come true. Overhearing, as it is intended he should, the conversation of the minor knaves, he expresses a desire to be made acquainted with its marvelous subject, the wonder-working magician, whom they represent as a personal stranger, only known to them by his reputation. At this moment Mandrogerus opportunely appears, pacing in a brown study. Summoned to give a test of his skill, he proceeds to expose the iniquities of Sycophanta and Sardanapalus, with whom he is supposed to be unacquainted, just as the fortune-tellers show one another up in *The Bloody Brother*. We give a portion of the scene in Peacock's version:

*Mand.:* I know none of you three  
 By any previous knowledge.  
*Sard.:* That is certain.  
*Mand.:* First, then, to thee. Thy name is Sardanapalus:  
 Poor and low-born.  
*Sard.:* 'Tis so.  
*Mand.:* A poor man's child,  
 Mocked with a royal name.

- Sard.*: I can't deny it.  
*Mand.*: An idler and a glutton: petulant:  
 Calamitous thyself, and a calamity  
 To all who know thee.  
*Sard.*: Eh! Mandrogerus.  
 I did not ask thee to proclaim my vices.  
*Mand.*: I may not lie. What hast thou more to ask?  
*Sard.*: I have heard too much already. If thou hast  
 Aught more, reserve it for my private hearing.  
*Syc.*: Now to my turn, Mandrogerus, tell my fortune,  
 So much of it as may be good: no more.  
*Mand.*: I must begin from the beginning. Thou  
 Art Sycophanta, and of noble birth.  
*Syc.*: 'Tis true.  
*Mand.*: A worthless subject from the first.  
*Syc.*: Alas!  
*Mand.*: Pressed down by wrongs, compassed by perils  
 From steel, and fire, and water.  
*Syc.*: It would seem  
 That thou hadst lived with me.  
*Mand.*: Nought of thine own<sup>1</sup>  
 Is left to thee, but much of other men's.  
*Syc.*: Too much, too much. Pray favour me no further.

Querolus is now eager to make trial of the magician, who seems to be fully justifying the encomiums which he has heard, or, as he erroneously deems, overheard, from the conversation of Sardanapalus and Sycophanta:

I have known magi and astrologers;  
 But never one like this. Soon as he sees you  
 He calls you by your name: expounds your parents,  
 Slaves, family: the history of your life:  
 All you have done, and will do.

The rogues in *The Bloody Brother* similarly endeavor to impress Latorche with a fitting sense of the pre-eminence of *their* wizard:

- Rusee*: We shall hardly draw  
 Him from his chair.  
*Latorche*: Tell him he shall have gold.  
*Fiske*: O, such a syllable would make him forswear  
 Ever to breathe in your sight.  
*Latorche*: How, man?

<sup>1</sup> *Aes alienum*.



*Norb.*: I see it; see the planets,  
 Where, how they are disposed; the Sun and Mercury,  
 Mars with the Dragon's tail in the third house,  
 And Pars Fortunae in the Imo Coeli,  
 Then Jupiter in the twelfth, the Cacodaemon.  
 . . . . .  
 The geniture nocturnal, longitude  
 At twenty-one degrees, the latitude  
 At forty-nine and ten minutes. How are the Cardines?  
*Fiske*: Libra in twenty-four, forty-four minutes.

Not only is the technical language of astrology accurately preserved, but the latitude and longitude of Caen, where the duke's birth took place, are given with entire correctness, the latter being reckoned from the meridian of Hierro, one of the Canary Islands, as it usually was in Ben Jonson's time. The fact that it would not be so reckoned at the time of the action of *The Bloody Brother* would not disturb a Jacobean dramatist. All the professional talk among the astrologers is equally correct in its employment of terms of art and its references to Arabian astrological authorities, "Messahalal, Zael,<sup>1</sup> or Alkindus." It seems to us unlikely that this erudition was merely got up for the occasion. Much less would have amply served the purposes of the stage. The author was as well acquainted with astrology as (if indeed, as we trust we have rendered probable, he knew the obscure *Querolus*), he must have been with classical literature. There is no dramatist of the age in whom such various knowledge is so likely to have been combined as Ben Jonson, whose authorship of this admirable scene, which bears few traces of Fletcher's peculiar versification, is probable on other grounds.

We have not considered the question whether any other scenes in the play should be attributed to Jonson. It will no doubt be examined by Mr. Bullen. Nor need we follow out the action of the *Querolus*, except by the assurance that the denouement is entirely agreeable to poetical justice.

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<sup>1</sup>All editions read *Lael*; but this name occurs nowhere else; while *Zael* or *Sael* was a distinguished Arabian astrologer whose works were translated into Latin. The correction was made a few years ago by a correspondent of the *Athenæum*.